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By W.P.Thirkield.

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ART. V.—AMERICAN HIGHLANDERS AND OUR EDUCATION MISSION TO THEM

"Thou wearest upon thy forehead clear
The freedom of the mountaineer."

WHO are the American Highlanders? Where do they live? What of them? Of the Scotch Highlanders, Macaulay once said: "Not one gentleman in twenty who meets at Wills's Coffee House in London knows that less than five hundred miles away there exists such a condition and such a people as the Scotch Highlanders." And so here in America. Most people are ignorant as to the whereabouts, the character and life of the several millions of sturdy, high-souled, clean-blooded Anglo-Saxon Highlanders of the Central South. As the mountain ranges where they dwell form the backbone of this country, so these Highlanders of native American stock, virile in faculty, large in capacity, of free and unbroken spirit, form the backbone of the people. They are found in the hill and mountain country of Northern Alabama and Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia. It is a region about six hundred miles long and three hundred miles wide, covered with noble mountains, which are cut up by swift and narrow streams into valleys, gorges and coves. Here is the "land of the sky." And here is a population of over three million, more than that of half a dozen western states put together. Though a large proportion are illiterate and in poverty, the name "poor whites" does not fit them. In their high-souled independence, the spirit of these mountain people is portrayed in the lines of Mrs. Hemans:

"For the strength of the hills we bless thee,
Our God, our father's God!
Thou hast made thy children mighty
By the touch of the mountain sod;
Thou hast fixed our ark of refuge
Where the spoiler's feet ne'er trod;
For the strength of the hills we bless thee,
Our God, our father's God!"

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Here for generations, shut off from civilization, without adequate schools, and often with an illiterate ministry, hundreds of thousands of these people have lived and reared their children. Their ancestry traces back to Colonial times. These mountain walls have cut them off from the rest of the country. Shut up in the coves and valleys, clinging to the rough mountain sides, cut off from an advancing civilization, they have remained a primitive people, living as their fathers lived, with their quaint forms of speech and antiquated tools of toil. Here is found the largest percentage of people in the nation of English and Scotch-Irish descent, in many counties averaging from ninety-four to ninety-six per cent. Of pure, clean blood, uncontaminated by the vices of civilization, they love their native hills. They are children of liberty. In the Revolution these sturdy patriots saved the day in the crisis at King's Mountain. At the battle of Guilford Courthouse they did heroic service. Here is the largest percentage of descendants of Revolutionary soldiers. Hundreds of families hold government land titles, coming down from the early days of the Republic. In the great civil strife that threatened the life of the nation, from these mountains 140,000 volunteer patriots, loyal to the Union, came forth at the call of Lincoln.

These mountain people are also of fine native capacity. Coming in close contact with the region reached by our institutions among the white people, a college graduate, who is a man of affairs and a keen student of character, said of them: "They need only an introduction to civilization to prove themselves equal to any men in the world. I regard these people as the finest rough material in the world, and consider one of them, modeled into available shape, worth to the world a dozen ordinary people." And yet to-day hundreds of thousands of these patriots, Protestants, Americans, are more ignorant and more destitute of the opportunities which go with education than any other body of Anglo-Saxon people on the face of the earth. Only one who has given his life for this virile yet backward people has a right to speak as to their condition. Such a one is the Rev. H. P. Smith, Superintendent of Missions for the Asheville Presbytery of the

Presbyterian Church. In an official pamphlet on *Some Results of Mission Work in the Mountains of North Carolina* he deplors the fact that some writers have not discriminated between the cultured population of the valley sections and the illiterate classes that dwell in the remote coves and on the rugged mountain slopes. He gives some such alarming facts as these: (1) In a certain mountain county there are 7,988 white children, of school age, 3,272 of whom have never attended school. It would take fifteen or twenty more schoolhouses to accommodate them. (2) In another county 31 white voters of every 100 cannot read or write. (3) Many children are kept from school because their parents are not able to purchase books. Numbers of families in these remote districts do not handle as much as \$10 in cash during the entire year. What they cannot make at home they get by barter. "We have visited many homes in which none of the inmates could read, and the Bible was not there because they could not read." As an example of conditions in the mountains, take Yancey County, North Carolina. It is in the heart of the Appalachian chain. Here is Mount Mitchell, the highest point in the United States east of the Rocky Mountains. Here are large forest stores. The county is rich in metals and minerals, with one of the finest veins of mica in the country. Of these mountaineer people there is a population of 11,464, an average of 38 to the square mile; 11,178 are native-born whites, 3 foreign-born, and 283 are colored. Of the 2,359 of voting age, 31 per cent of the white and 63 of the colored are illiterate. The school population of the county is 4,418. Of these only 2,566 are enrolled in the schools. The average daily attendance is 1,949—only 44 per cent of the school population. In the white schools the average length of the session is 65 days, but 28 days is the average number attended by each white child of school age. Forty-nine teachers are employed at average salaries of less than \$22 per month.¹

Think of the startling revelations of the last census. Of the native white population of the whole country, ten years of age and over, the South has 24 per cent, but of the native illiteracy of the

¹ Bulletin of the Southern Education Board, May, 1902.

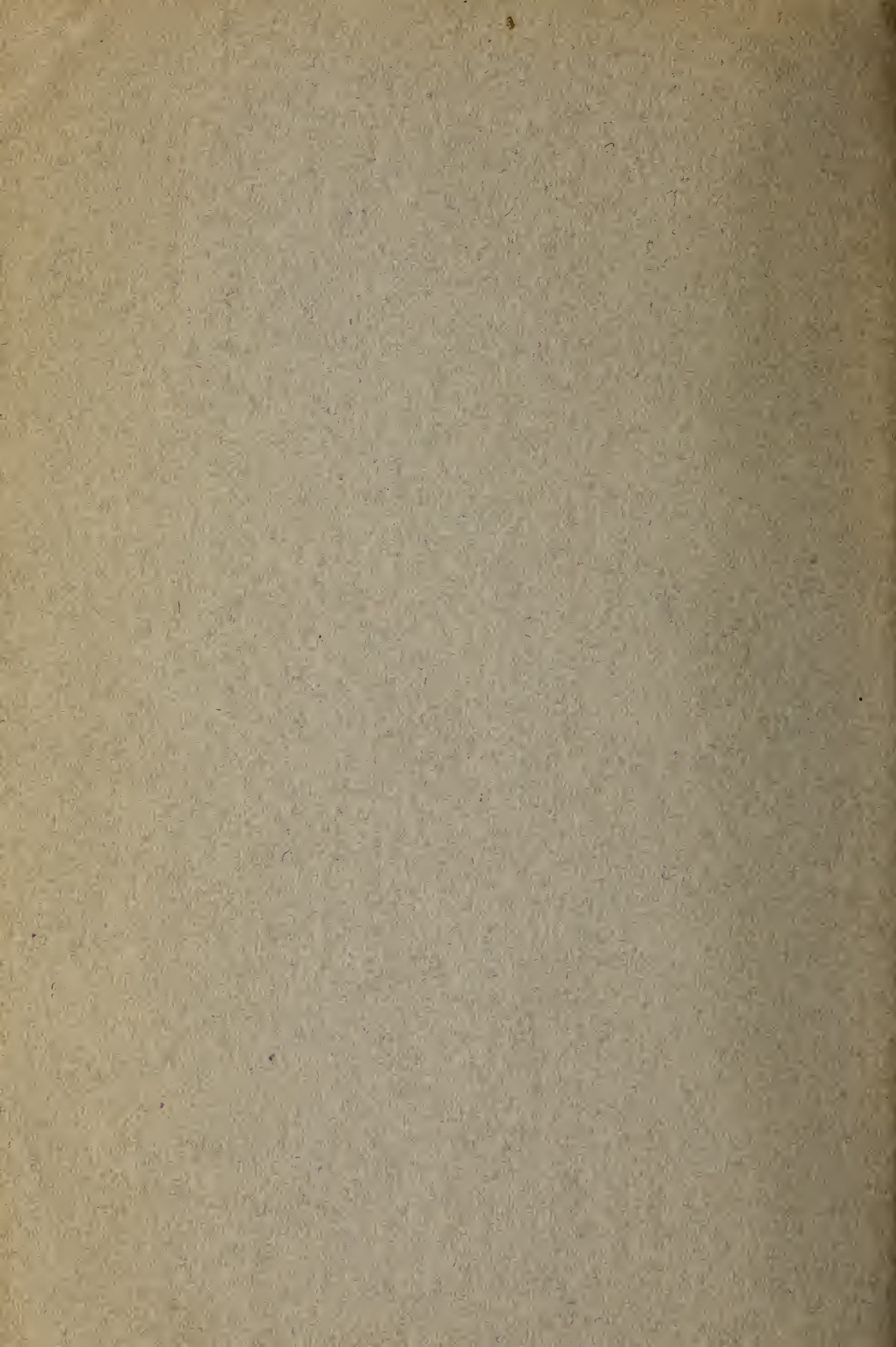
nation the South has 64 per cent. "There are in the United States," says Edgar Gardner Murphy in *Problems of the Present South*, "231 counties in which twenty per cent and over of the white men of voting age cannot read and write. Of these 231 counties, 210 are in our Southern states," and most of them are in the mountain region. This fact should awaken the nation: that in the South "there are ten million whites of native American stock, having 3,500,000 children of school age, with few exceptions, unprovided with good schools." Seventeen millions live in the country, outside of towns of 1,000 inhabitants. Only 60 per cent of these children were enrolled in the schools in 1900. The average daily attendance is only 70 per cent of the enrollment. Forty-two per cent are actually at school. One white child in every five is left wholly illiterate. The average citizen in North Carolina gets only 2.6 years of schooling; of Alabama 2.4 years. Says Dr. Dabney, for years president of the University of Tennessee, "In the Southern states, in schoolhouses costing an average of \$276 each, we are giving the children in actual attendance five cents' worth of education a day for eighty-seven days only in the year." In every Southern state there has been in the last thirty years, an increase of white males twenty years old and over, who can neither read nor write. In 1890 there were in all these states 175,883 more illiterate native white men than in 1870.

Another revelation of the census of 1900 is this: That the percentage of illiteracy among the native-born sons of native parents is 5.9, while that among the native-born sons of foreign parents is only 2 per cent. What a startling fact! That we have been reaching through our schools foreign-born more effectively than our native-born children. And why? Simply because the foreigners, now coming in from the south of Europe at the rate of more than a million a year, land and live in the great cities, where there is a school and a teacher for every child. The single city of Boston last year appropriated more than twice as much for the schools of its people—over 70 per cent foreign—as any southern state except Texas. In the three states of Alabama, North Carolina and South Carolina the average term of schooling for each

child is 2.5 years. There are actually in school only 42 per cent of the children. In North and South Carolina the average value of a school property is \$179; the average salary of a teacher per month is \$23.28. While this nation is putting millions into battleships to protect us against some imaginary foe, while Alaskan children in government schools have \$17.85 per capita annually for their education, millions of children in the South are in mental starvation for lack of efficient schooling.

X The nation with its millions of foreign immigrants, that now dominate certain sections, needs this strain of pure Anglo-Saxon blood to reinforce the depleted blood of our people. Protestant to the core, they have the poorest educational chance of any white people in America. While the Roman Catholic millions, in the great cities, have the best schools, these Protestant Americans have the worst. With their pure Americanism and their intense patriotism they have in them capacity for immense service to the nation. With the politics of our corrupted cities, filled with their millions of un-Americanized foreigners, and with the aggressiveness of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in national life, we may yet see the day when the sturdy Protestantism and uncorrupted Americanism of these mountain patriots may be sorely needed to safeguard Republican institutions. The great need of the South is trained teachers, preachers, mothers and homemakers who have come in touch with the larger life through our schools. From our Grant University at Athens and Chattanooga, with its twenty-one affiliated academies scattered throughout this region from Alabama to the sea, the Freedmen's Aid and Southern Education Society is sending forth teachers and Christian workers to multitudes of people who are eager for light and help.

Wm. Kirkland



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